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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000422

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TAGS: [IZ](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: MALIKI CABINET APPROVES MOSUL CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: On February 7, Prime Minister Maliki convened a cabinet-level Crisis Action Cell (CAC) to review the concept of operations for the upcoming campaign against al-Qaeda (AQI) in Ninewa province. Major General Riyadh, Commander of the Ninewa Operations, briefed a three-phased plan that called for securing access routes into Mosul, implementing district-by-district clearing operations against AQI starting from the city center, and developing a sustained reconstruction effort emphasizing renewal of basic governmental services. The Cabinet approved the concept of operations, but asked that the detailed strategic plan include specific timelines, increased emphasis on the police and judiciary, and operations to secure the border checkpoint at Rabiah. During the meeting, the senior Iraqi leadership demonstrated a clear understanding of counterinsurgency fundamentals by their questions and critiques. The presence of Vice-President Hashimi--who has strongly criticized Maliki in the past--also sent a strong signal that Iraqis are uniting against a dangerous foe. This Iraqi-led major operation--with Coalition Forces in a support role--will provide significant insights into ISF capabilities. END SUMMARY.

Maliki Sets the Stage

12. (S) Prime Minister Maliki convened a cabinet-level CAC on February 7 to review the concept of operations for the upcoming campaign against AQI in Ninewa province. In addition to his senior security cabinet members, the Prime Minister invited Vice President Hashimi, Governor Kashmoula of Ninewa Province, and senior MNF-I commanders to attend and critique the plan. Maliki conducted the two-hour meeting in an organized, direct fashion yet allowed the cabinet and military commanders broad leeway in critiquing the concept of operations and its consequences.

13. (S) Maliki opened the CAC by defining the strategic goal for the Mosul operation--"eliminate AQI influence in Ninawa province". He instructed his cabinet and military commanders to use the lessons learned from the ongoing Baghdad campaign and apply them to Mosul. Maliki laid out the process by which the cabinet would do strategic planning for the operation and how the CAC discussion would proceed. He then invited General Riyadh to present his concept of operations.

Mosul Concept of Operations

14. (S) Riyadh began with an assessment of the AQI threat to Ninewa province citing the most significant potential targets as Mosul Dam, Tigris River bridges, the Christian community,

and government and social infrastructure. To counter this threat, he described his three-phase concept of operations:

-- Phase I: Continue current and extensive military reconnaissance of Ninewa province while redeploying military forces around the city of Mosul. Strictly control access into and out of Mosul using eleven checkpoints--some yet to be built--on major access routes into the city. Block, secure, or eliminate all other access routes. Starting from the center of Mosul, secure individual city districts by disrupting ongoing AQI operations, clearing out AQI operatives, controlling the area with robust 24/7 ISF deployment, and retaining each district with security and basic services. Police will maintain responsibility for security in the city center. The Second Iraqi Army (IA) Division will control the outer districts of the city, check points into the city, and the eastern part of the province.

-- Phase II: Reinforce strategic positions on the east side of the province with Second Iraqi Army (IA) Division and in the west--from Tall Afar to the border--with the Third IA Division. Police emergency brigades (note: similar to National Police, end note) and civilian police will assist these army units. Improve infrastructure/border security and continue ongoing reconstruction.

-- Phase III: Make Iraqi Police (IP) primarily responsible for community security; renew IA focus on external threats. Concentrate other government ministries on completion of reconstruction and delivery of services. Extend the process throughout Ninewa province until AQI-influence is eliminated.

Timelines

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¶15. (S) When pressed by the cabinet for actual phase dates, General Riyadh insisted they should be "conditions-based" without regard to a calendar. Later in the meeting, under pressure from MinDef Abdel Qadr and Vice President Hashimi, Riyadh relented slightly and described Phase I as starting immediately and continuing roughly until the middle of May, Phase II lasting until the end of July, and Phase III continuing from August onwards. But Riyadh insisted these dates were only estimates and not cast in stone.

Securing the Border

¶16. (S) After Riyadh finished his formal briefing, Maliki asked Interior Minister (IntMin) Bolani to begin the discussion and offer his critique. Bolani concurred with the basic concept of operations but asked for a more robust plan for the police and judiciary, urging formation of independent legal panels from outside the region to process the large number of anticipated detainees. He also suggested additional focus in the plan against local AQI financial resources such as kickbacks from black market distribution of kerosene and gasoline. Bolani also expressed serious concern with corruption and lack of security at the Iraqi-Syrian border Port of Entry (POE) at Rabiah, calling it a major threat to the battle for Mosul.

¶17. (S) General Riyadh concurred with Bolani on the problems at Rabiah POE, saying it might be necessary to close it completely during some of his anticipated military operations. General Mosin, Commander of the Iraqi Border Guards, disagreed arguing that closure of the largest trade route into the city would strangle the economy of Mosul. He urged Riyadh to explore other alternatives like establishing additional military checkpoints between Rabiah and Mosul. While Mosin admitted to serious corruption problems at Rabiah, he said he was already considering changing out personnel at Rabiah every six months and replacing them with border guards from other regions. He also believed it

necessary to move the POE checkpoint outside the town of Rabiah into a less-congested area, but he lamented that severe limitations in funding and personnel within the Border Guards prevented implementation of these solutions.

Maliki and the Provincial Governor "Get It"

¶18. (S) Ninewa Provincial Governor Kashmoula urged General Riyadh to deploy security forces from their camps into the populated areas as soon as possible. Maliki echoed that sentiment with a query about locations of Joint Security Stations (JSS) inside Mosul. Riyadh acknowledged their importance and pointed out the JSS locations to Maliki and Kashmoula on a map of Mosul. (Comment: The JSS combines Coalition Force (CF), IA, and IP forces together in a neighborhood command post, much like a local police station and is considered one of the key elements in improving Baghdad security over the past year. End Comment.)

¶19. (S) Concerning Rabiah POE, General Petraeus agreed that its closure for an extended period would cripple Mosul. He suggested that General Mosin use the technical and procedural solutions recently developed for the Al-Qaim POE in Anbar province and adapt them to the Rabiah POE. General Petraeus also offered Coalition Force assistance, especially for improving biometric data collection and processing.

Pressure for Actual Timelines

¶10. (S) MinDef Abdel Qadr also agreed with the operations concept but criticized Riyadh's presentation as lacking specific timelines. On the other hand, he took note of Riyadh's request for more troops and offered him additional Special Forces and mechanized units as required. The MinDef also questioned reports of shortages in uniforms and equipment in the 2 IA and 3 IA Divisions, but relented when General Petraeus reminded him that equipment shortages with these units were due primarily to the high rate of "battle losses" in Mosul that Coalition Forces were also experiencing.

¶11. (S) Vice-President Hashimi said he was happy with the concept of operations, but concurred with the MinDef on the need for specific timelines. He also expressed concern that the number of ISF forces committed to the Mosul operation was too small. He urged Riyadh to develop a more comprehensive intelligence plan, especially regarding AQI intentions.

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Hashimi requested that the more detailed plan--currently under development--put additional emphasis on local councils and governmental institutions, particularly in the service sector. The Vice President concluded with a cautionary note about the necessity for limiting civilian casualties and collateral damage during operations in Mosul.

Detailed Plan Coming

¶12. (S) National Security Advisor (NSA) Rubaie pointed out this particular meeting was meant to focus on the overall concept of operations and not the detailed plan. He explained that many of the issues raised by the MinDef, IntMin, and VP had been discussed extensively during the survey visit to Mosul and in subsequent planning sessions. He assured them the comprehensive strategic plan would also include robust plans for police, intelligence, and civilian operations. Additionally, he said that all members of the Council of Representatives (CoR) from Ninewa province would receive a detailed briefing so the government and legislature could speak with one voice.

¶13. (S) Multi-National Division - North (MND-N) Commander, Major General Hertling, told the Prime Minister that the ISF

and CF were in close coordination and assured him the ISF would have access to the tactical intelligence they needed. He reiterated General Petraeus' offer to work with the IP and Border Guards to help re-equip their forces, especially up-armored humvees. The General urged the IntMin to focus on the prison and detainee issues because they would be critical factors in this campaign, noting that assistance from all the other Iraqi ministries was absolutely necessary for a successful outcome. In conclusion, Hertling echoed Riyadh's caution about the timelines, pointing out that not all ISF units were yet in place.

¶14. (S) General Riyadh closed the two-hour meeting with an urgent request for Ministry of Justice assistance in securing the Baddush prison which--because it is Mosul's major detention facility--will figure prominently in this counterinsurgency campaign. Riyadh cautioned that even though security forces had recently subdued rioting prisoners there, the prison remained very volatile.

Comment

¶15. (S) This was a landmark meeting for several reasons. First, Prime Minister Maliki showed strong leadership during the CAC by keeping the participants focused on the agenda and follow-on discussions. Second, the senior Iraqi government leaders demonstrated a clear grasp of counterinsurgency fundamentals in their critiques and requested additions to the plan. Clearly, they had internalized many of the lessons learned from Baghdad operations. Maliki's invitation to Vice President Hashimi--who has been a harsh critic of the Prime Minister's policies--sent a strong signal that Iraqis are uniting in this campaign against a very dangerous foe. Finally, the ISF will lead this operation with the CF in a support role. How well the ISF performs will provide evidence of their growing capacity or reveal weaknesses to be addressed through further CF mentoring and training. End comment.
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